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The new mimics? Cross-cultural learning in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil

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Abstract

The city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil attracts considerable numbers of visitors who spend time there in order to participate in local cultural practices, particularly percussion music, capoeira and African-Brazilian dance. This paper investigates the extent of their engagement with those practices and with the wider cultural context. It was found that such participatory cross-cultural learning, adoption and travel can be split into categories and differs markedly from conventional tourism. Theorisations of cultural interaction have frequently concentrated on colonialism or migration, where acculturation is a by-product of political, economic and even military shifts. The concept of ‘mimicry’ as used in postcolonial theory is evoked here and considered in relation to the processes studied. One of the main differences is that the subjects voluntarily expose themselves to a measure of culture shock. Furthermore, the adoption takes place against the predominant global flow of cultural influence from the ‘West’ to the rest. Apart from certain factors which make Bahian culture accessible and attractive, motivating factors for this voluntary movement and orientation are the perception of particular aspects of that culture as ‘authentic other’, as well as a weakened attachment to place, specifically to Western community and cultural origins.

Keywords

Cultural adoption; mimicry; globalisation; Brazil; mobilities.

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Introduction

Ulrich Beck writes, 'Transnational place polygamy, marriage to several places at once, belonging in different worlds: this is the gateway to globality in one's own life.' (2000, p. 73). The present paper examines a particular instance of 'place polygamy', involving voluntary engagement with an 'alien' culture by visiting outsiders. The 'Westerners' (Europeans and Anglo-Americans) in question flock to the city of Salvador da Bahia to study and adopt aspects of its African-Brazilian culture. My ethnographic fieldwork explores to what extent they become connected with, and knowledgeable about, the cultural manifestations which they travel to study, and their wider context. I will consider the motivations for this kind of transcultural activity, including the relationship such travellers have with their native culture. I shall relate this phenomenon to the concept of 'mimicry' as evoked by V.S. Naipaul and taken up by Homi Bhabha in the context of various colonial and post-colonial cultural juxtapositions and interactions.

Globalisation has been addressed from many perspectives in the cluster of disciplines concerned with societies, cultures and space. Among these perspectives we may count economics, particularly concerning powerful nations and corporations (Sassen 1988), migration (Said 1993), tourism (Urry 1994), (post-) colonialism (Bhabha 1994), global media (Rantanen 2005), hegemony (Harvey 1989), virtual travel (Kassabian 2004) and trade in culture and cultural products (Myers 1995). Taken together we can talk of 'mobilities' which John Urry (2000) proposes as central to the study of social phenomena in the 21st century.

The range of activities described in this paper are perhaps most akin to tourism, although that term does not do them justice. We particularly think of the tourist gaze, and of tourists 'consuming' places (Urry 2011, 1994). Locations are inevitably attenuated by tourism, they are created or re-created for tourist taste and the visitor is expected to take something away: a souvenir, pictures, impressions, some knowledge, memories. The subjects of this paper however engage in cultural participation to a greater extent than we usually expect from tourists. They stay longer, they study - albeit independently, they acquire language skills and they become competent in cultural practices which we would expect tourists to watch and marvel at, perhaps try out for fun, but not seriously work at. This process means that they have something in common not just with tourists and 'study abroad' students, but with migrants, in that they place themselves in the position of a cultural naïf, henceforth inhabiting

a 'third space' between cultures, and attaining eventually a state of 'hybridity', concepts invoked by Homi Bhabha. They also become cultural conduits, carrying practices to other locations, inevitably adapting, as well as adopting, what they have sought out and learned, and passing it on to others, who, in a chain of 'Chinese whispers', will change those practices again in their own construction of uses and meanings.

While this dissemination will be addressed in terms of the personal dimension - the 'globality in one's own life'² - the implications of this are not just personal but also political. The process under discussion goes against the dominant current of commodified cultural flow, which is backed up by overwhelming corporate, political and military power, and moves from Europe (most significantly the UK) and the US to other parts of the world in the form of films, television programmes, popular music, fashion and online content. By contrast, the influence dealt with here is participatory, coming from a 'developing' country, going to the richer 'West'. It is motivated by an interest in learning and disseminating particular musics and choreographies, which embody a range of meanings, some of which can be considered oppositional, in that they resist and contradict dominant economic and geopolitical power relations. In other words, rather than the poor consuming the products of the Western culture industries, those from richer countries are learning (from) the creative discourses of Brazil. These are in themselves to some extent oppositional in origin; capoeira,³ samba-reggae and *Candomblé* having a role in the survival, resistance and emancipation (from slavery and discrimination) of oppressed African-Brazilians and their culture at various historical junctures. The phenomenon of middle class Westerners aspiring to competence in these cultural manifestations of the lower classes of a developing country is a reversal of the tendency to imitate the West in a colonial context, as critiqued by Frantz Fanon (2008), and as seen more recently in the global reach of Anglo-American cultural products. The related idea of mimicry arises from Naipaul's 1974 novel *The Mimic Men* and is developed and theorised by Bhabha (1994) in relation to colonial and postcolonial experiences. It concerns those under the domination of an imperial power in a dependent territory, or postcolonial immigrants to the West from former colonies. They are faced with the choice of trying to assimilate into the hegemonic culture; being excluded from that culture with a consequent loss of social and economic options; or creating a liminal 'third space'. Due to the impossibility of integrating completely, which is built into the hegemonic situation, and the

² Loc. cit.

³ Capoeira is a rhythmic martial art carried out to music and chanting, with origins in African-Brazilian slave culture.

difficulty of resisting the dominant culture, the ‘third space’ option becomes in effect the only one, and is seen by Bhabha as a creative locus of elision. Mimicry then, is at once insufficient, since it is ‘inauthentic’, but also a process which opens up new possibilities, new relations.

The concept of mimicry can be relevant to the phenomenon under examination here. The power relations are very different, but nevertheless, we are witnessing the attempt to acquire an alien culture, to communicate in an initially unintelligible language or dialect, to understand histories, genres, sensibilities, to embody choreographies, to learn songs and rhythms of a different type to those with which one has grown up. And we know that such a ‘journey’, if we may allow a spatial metaphor for a spatial process, can be exciting, enriching and enlightening, but ultimately rarely complete, because total adult (re-) enculturation is rare. Immigrant children usually learn the language of the new country perfectly, but their parents tend to struggle with it all their lives.

Bhabha’s work seeks to go beyond binary conceptualisations of cultural interaction. In a strategy that is potentially useful in a situation of shifting global relationships and hierarchies he attempts to,

‘...provide a new space and time for the politics of culture in the contemporary era which transcends any conception of relations between cultures – whether or not situated in the same nation space – either in terms which approximate to the US model of *e pluribus unum* (this simply disguises the continued domination of the old centres of authority) or in terms of an aggregate of confrontational, fundamentalist particularisms.’

Moore-Gilbert (1997 p. 126)

The case dealt with in this paper also challenges such monolithic conceptions demonstrating rather a differentiated engagement at the level of individuals and small, tangible networks. The kinds of cultural adoption presented here are of interest because they require a re-theorization of cultural interfaces and exchanges in relation to existing conceptualisations of appropriation, domination, acculturation and hegemony. Due to the particular conditions, this must constitute a search for a ‘new space’ between identities, and a different analysis. Such an endeavour, beyond exploring and considering the activities here described, may also provide some conceptual tools for understanding wider contemporary globalisation processes, since these consist largely of cross-cultural impacts and overlaps of various kinds.

Many terms come to mind when thinking about the processes studied. Tourism, pilgrimage, culture seeking and acquisition are all potentially relevant but none entirely encompass what is at issue. The phrase 'participatory cross-cultural learning, adoption and travel', while cumbersome, does come close. Whereas it is mostly self-explanatory, I would like to consider the word 'adoption' more closely. It implies something other than 'acquisition' or even 'appropriation', more a process which comprises both an embracing and a becoming part of, particularly for those who find themselves more deeply involved. The individuals may indeed be taking something for themselves, but their statements suggest that they are also surrendering to the culture they are learning about in a very real sense. They are less taking up something quaint and attractive to play with or profit from, more discovering something they are in awe of. The Brazilian practice becomes the model. Visitors are instructed by native experts, teachers and group leaders of high status, although the foreigners can achieve a considerable level of acceptance and a certain status within a group themselves. Adoption, then, means not only the outsider adopting a foreign culture, but also that foreign culture adopting the outsider.

Attraction to other cultures

There are many circumstances and phenomena which can create contact between cultures. Migration (our own or that of others), travel, media, war, colonisation, education, industrial and economic activity are some obvious examples. Frequently, such contact is unwanted, even feared. Sometimes it is a by-product of something else, causing difficulty or trauma, but may turn out to be beneficial, too. There have been many who have sought out new cultural experiences as an end in themselves. Travellers and explorers from Marco Polo to Alexander von Humboldt and Claude Lévi-Strauss took great danger and hardship upon themselves to encounter the unknown. George Borrow stayed closer to home in the 19th Century but was able to learn the languages of minorities such as the Welsh and Gypsies in Britain as part of better understanding their cultures. European upper class young men in the 18th and 19th Centuries often went on a Grand Tour of their continent to see great art and ancient monuments, but also to encounter different ways of life. In central Europe it was the custom for centuries, from the middle ages to the early years of the last century, for young craftsmen, upon completing their apprenticeship to go on *Wanderschaft*, plying their trade in different

places, gaining experience and seeing something of the world, before settling down. In our age the 'gap year' is an opportunity to similarly experience different places and cultures, and amongst the educated strata of many countries it is thought highly desirable for the young to spend some time studying abroad. Of course the example nearest at hand is tourism. It has become an annual ritual for people with the necessary means to travel to another country, see the sights, try the food, make generalisations about different habits and perhaps learn to say a few words and phrases in another language. Finally I should mention the academic disciplines which often require study in and of another culture; from modern languages to social anthropology, from ethnobotany to cultural geography.

While in all of these examples the exposure to another culture is sought out as interesting and beneficial, in many contemporary cases the engagement is not very deep. Many students on study trips abroad socialise mainly with compatriots, or other foreigners. Tourists frequently only gain the most approximate impression of the country visited, and in many cases are cocooned in settlements constructed especially for their use, where the contact with ordinary life is practically zero. In fact, once enculturated it is difficult to genuinely merge oneself into another culture, and for those that do so, whether out of choice or because they are obliged to, it becomes a life's work, a continual source of effort, frustration and revelation. And yet we can fall in love with another world or the idea of it, like the French-Lebanese samba player who told me she was a '*brésilienne de cœur*'. Such infatuation may best be left in the realm of fantasy as I have met a number of disillusioned and bitter 'expats', hating everything about the place they once loved and now idealising home, just as they once worshipped the 'new' country.

To want or need to engage with a different culture is commonplace. To do so voluntarily, happily, profoundly and successfully is, I would contend, rather difficult and somewhat unusual. European politicians and commentators who berate immigrants for not integrating (e.g. Sarrazin 2014), while frequently being of a xenophobic mind-set themselves, simply underestimate the difficulties involved, particularly if there is an immigrant community which offers easier connections. In a sense the unreconstituted immigrant, who still struggles to express herself in the language of the host country after decades of residence, is akin to the tourist who only skims the surface of another culture.

Background research and fieldwork in Brazil

In Europe and North America the last 25 years have seen the establishment and proliferation of groups offering participation in Brazilian cultural activities. Beginning with organisations such as the London School of Samba in the early 80s, which were largely attended by expatriate Brazilians, a situation has developed where there are hundreds of groups practicing mainly percussion music, capoeira and Afro-Brazilian dance. Today the vast majority of participants are non-Brazilians. I have been researching this network since 1997 using formal interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, and keeping in touch socially with many of those involved. Most informants have been part of groups in the principality of Wales and the city of Bristol in the UK. However, they are linked to various formal and informal networks and I frequently also come into contact with participants from other areas of the UK and other countries. I have attended multi-band samba meetings in the UK and in France for instance, where band members and instructors have an intense period of several days of learning, practice, performance and socialising.

My fieldwork has also included repeated periods in the city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, ranging from several weeks to several months at a time. The present study draws mostly on a period of five weeks in 2010/11 and five months in 2013/14. Salvador is the city with the highest proportion of *afrodescendentes* or African-Brazilians in the country. It is also a place with a highly active cultural sector, culminating in its carnival which is one of the biggest cultural events in the World,⁴ attracting 700,000 visitors to the state of Bahia (Withnal 2014). Although there are many musical genres practiced here, with new ones developing regularly, samba-reggae, capoeira and Afro-Brazilian dance are well established and are ultimately rooted in diasporic African culture and the history of slavery and the slave trade. The polytheistic cult of Candomblé is derived from West African religions, and is widely recognised and practiced in Bahia (Voeks 1997). It serves as a font of rhythms, concepts, gestures, choreographies and terminology for other practices such as the ones under consideration here. For all of these reasons Salvador serves as a magnet for those interested in these cultural manifestations. The abovementioned networks of groups and individuals existing in the ‘West’ extend to Salvador. Teacher-practitioners from here travel abroad to teach. Sometimes they set up groups, some emigrate, some establish a network of groups.

4

One such example is Batala, a chain of percussion bands which is by now global, with groups in Europe, North America, Brazil, South Africa and Australia. My fieldwork with this ‘franchise’ has included participating in a number of workshops run by their founder Giba Gonçalves in Wales, France and, most recently, with the womens’ Batala group in Washington DC.

Conversely ‘Westerners’ who practice capoeira, Brazilian percussion or dance at home, come to Salvador in large numbers in search of the source of their adopted performance art. Thus it is here that many networks connect, with visitors meeting Brazilians, as well as other foreigners with similar interests and experience. They encounter each other in dance or percussion classes held at *espaços culturais* (often privately operated studios for teaching and cultural projects), in the city dance school, at performances, in capoeira clubs, in the street and so on. This is the milieu in which I myself move in Salvador, meeting dancers, musicians and capoeiristas, going for lessons, playing with other musicians and attending concerts, other performances, dances, conferences, discussions, receptions, and social events.

Specifically for this paper I carried out seven formal interviews. One was with a Brazilian dance tutor in his thirties whose Afro-Brazilian and vernacular dance classes I had been attending. Another was a Danish man of around 50 who played in a Salvador percussion band in which I also participated. This was someone who had been married to a Brazilian and had spent a number of years in Salvador, although he periodically returned to Denmark for longer periods. I also interviewed a Canadian percussionist in his late twenties who played and taught professionally at home and was on a six week visit to study with particular percussion teachers. Another percussionist in her late 20s was from Britain and leads groups in England and France, specialising in percussion with movement. She was on a six month stay. Both of these last two musicians had been to Salvador for longer periods before. The last of the non-Brazilians was Jon Hardeman, who was involved with a Candomblé temple at which he studied and played during ceremonies. Finally I also went to the headquarters of the Batala movement and interviewed the aforementioned Giba Gonçalves. However, he did not have a great deal of time and passed me onto his deputy with whom I was able to talk in more depth. (I have however spoken with Giba on several other occasions, as well as with other Brazilian teachers and ensemble leaders.) My purpose in these interviews was to explore the depth of engagement of the visitors with their chosen practice and with Afro-Brazilian culture in

general, from their own point of view, and from the perspective of the Bahian teachers and group leaders.

On a less formal basis I also talked to at least 25 other people involved in the activities under discussion. Many were fellow students at dance and percussion classes. I would converse with them before or after class. Sometimes we would go for a drink or some food together, providing an opportunity to chat for longer. The questions of interest to this study arose naturally in these conversations: how long was their visit to Brazil? How many lessons were they taking? Did they dance/drum at home? Were they interested in Brazilian forms only, or did they also do other kinds of dance/percussion. Furthermore I was interested in observing and talking about the teacher-student interaction. What kind of information was conveyed? Did the teachers confine themselves to practical aspects of movement or technique for instance, or were there attempts to include a sense of the wider cultural context? I met other participants, both local and visiting, by moving in the Salvador cultural scene for the practices concerned, particularly around the Historic Centre where the Escola de Dança and other teaching spaces and music venues are located. This area also draws all kinds of tourists and is the locality for many performances of music, dance and capoeira, both in enclosed and public spaces. Here I would observe, participate, meet friends and acquaintances, and make new ones. Employing this range of naturalistic observation, participant observation, informal and formal interviews I was able to gain an intricate picture of the kinds of interaction between foreigners and African-Brazilians involved in music and dance.

My own participation in the wider cultural context of Salvador and in music and dance not only facilitated my meeting and observing informants, but meant that I was in many ways going through the same processes as they were. I am a male musician learning about Brazilian musical forms. In dance classes I am a foreigner trying to internalise Afro-Brazilian choreographies, and day-to-day I work at improving my Portuguese, as well as being confronted for lengthy periods with all the joys and frustrations of living, traveling, eating and conversing in a part of the world I am only slowly becoming accustomed to. In this way the observations and theorisations in this paper are informed by autoethnographic practice as

well as ethnography. The fieldwork journal I keep is an account of my own experiences and reflections as well as being a record of the comments and behaviors of others.⁵

Positionality and authenticity

My positionality is one of outsider and culture adopter vis-à-vis African-Brazilian practices, but insider in terms of the people who are my main research focus; other ‘Westerners’, or gringos in Latin American parlance. The latter position throws up the typical paradox of studying one’s own culture: being at once more familiar with meanings and nuances, but having to work to achieve a sense of distance and objectivity. The Western informants view me as similar to themselves, which facilitates interaction with them, even though I inform them of the kind of research I am carrying out. The Brazilian teachers and performers see me as an outsider and it is through the usual fieldwork procedures of building relationships and gaining their trust that I have been able to draw them out about their communication with and opinions of other foreigners. The work was helped by carrying out interactions in the informant’s mother tongue in the vast majority of cases, this being mostly English and Portuguese.

Most of the visitors to Salvador have begun practicing an Afro-Brazilian performance art in their home country. Their contact with Brazilians will in many cases have been minimal and their teachers, whether Brazilian or not, will have frequently referred to how things are done there - the rhythmic feel is like this in carnival, the dance movement is like that at street parties, and in *rodas* in Bahia, they often do these capoeira moves. Thus a sense of authentic otherness is constructed in the scene in Europe and North America. Brazilians are seen as being immersed in these cultural manifestations from an early age, and sometimes as having a ‘natural’ ability in them. Actually, some Brazilians study dance, capoeira and music formally. Many who do not are outside this fairly specific cultural sphere, even if they live in Bahia, let alone in the rest of the country. There are many types of popular culture in Salvador and their precise social positioning, while fascinating, is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that many locals do not actively engage in Afro-Brazilian dance,

⁵ My experience of learning a new culture goes beyond this particular research, having emigrated from Germany to England with my family as a child, and coming to Wales as a student and eventually becoming a Welsh speaker and working at times through Welsh. I have therefore been in the situation both of ‘traditional immigrant’ and of cultural traveller and adopter, both of which are discussed in this paper.

samba-reggae or capoeira. These are the practices which are particularly attractive to outsiders, because they appear more authentic, more different, more exotic, which in turn is because they are less similar to commodified Western forms. They are however not unaffected by these, samba-reggae having been influenced not only by reggae and popular samba, but also by US-American soul and funk. There is thus a privileging of a particular type of Brazilian culture which has been mediated by the clubs and teachers in the Brazilian culture scene abroad, which is then sought out in and projected onto Bahia. Dydia DeLyser (1999) similarly found a privileging of a particular narrative of the (Wild) West which was being perceived in a mining/ghost town of Bodie in California, obfuscating narratives from native American, Mexican or other non-white perspectives. Stacy Burton (2014, p. 167) also describes how particular ideas of authenticity arise at certain junctures and can be linked to shifts in power and the changing accessibility of places and peoples. She points out that,

‘Authenticity cannot be guaranteed, for it is a complex performance that occurs within cultural and geopolitical contexts that are at once mutable and fragile.’

In the present study what is being approached by the culture adopters is a notion of authenticity of otherness. The exotic other provides the promise of ‘real’ expression and connection with aspects of the self and others, which the adopters report appears unavailable in the cultures from where they hail. Their participatory engagement is intended to bring them closer to an authentic Other and can serve to differentiate them from ‘consumer tourism’ in the sense of Victor Segalen’s (2002, p. 25) idea of the *Exot* - of someone who can truly appreciate otherness. However, their willingness to place themselves under the tutelage of a Bahian *mestre*, sometimes for a period of years, suggests a respect and admiration of the culture they are studying, which is borne out by their testimony. This is markedly at variance with Segalen’s subject position, influenced as it is by aristocratic connoisseurism, or with Said’s view of imperialist orientalism, or the condescension frequently associated with notions of otherness (Staszak 2008).

Types of engagement

Over all I discovered an extremely wide range in levels of engagement, from tourists interested in a cultural form trying a lesson or two, to repeat visitors who stayed for months, learnt Portuguese, and became acknowledged experts in a Bahian cultural practice. It is possible to divide the travellers broadly into four categories which delineate their depth of involvement with Afro-Bahian culture. I will refer to these as Types 1-4. Type 1 describes experimenters who try out a cultural practice while on a visit which may be motivated by the desire to participate in that general form (i.e. dance, percussion music). Type 2 comprises those who come with the intention of immersing themselves in a practice for a few days or weeks. Often these are members of one of the overseas branches of a Bahian group in their place of residence, and they seek out the home base of that group in Salvador. Type 3 describes those who are themselves experts and teachers in dance, music or capoeira, and use repeated periods of intensive study to enhance their expertise. Finally, Type 4 consists of those who achieve a kind of biculturalism centred around their chosen Bahian cultural form; they remain English, French or Canadian, but in that form they are highly integrated, and this entails being encultured in many other respects as well. I have added the descriptors ‘dippers’, ‘divers’, ‘swans’ and ‘mermaids’ to the four types to metaphorically illustrate the extent of their immersion in the adopted culture.

Type 1: dippers

There are many dance, capoeira and percussion schools (sometimes offering more than one of these activities) in the Centro Histórico of Salvador. They typically have signs visible from the streets, and sometimes open onto them like shops. Despite this surface accessibility, taking a class usually involves more than just walking in. The sessions are not continuous and the outsider has to have the time and patience to look, book and return to take a class. Although Salvador is a tourist city, with beaches and big hotels, and several cruise ships at a time moored in the harbour, I cannot say that I met many tourists who simply took a taster lesson and had no deeper interest in music, dance or Brazilian culture. I can only conclude that ‘package’ tourists and cruise tourists are different to my informants. They may troop through the old town in a group, taking photographs, stopping at a souvenir shop, taking

refreshments at a central café, but they are less likely to book a dance or drum lesson independently and return at the appointed time to participate.⁶

I did encounter a number of people, however, who took dance classes and were really interested in dance generally, rather than being focused on a particular dance culture. One woman, a medical doctor from London, went to two dance classes per week at home and had expanded her hobby with lengthy holidays in Buenos Aires (for tango) and Cuba (for salsa). Thus if dancing is a key activity in someone's life, Afro-Bahian dance might be an item in a set that they are collecting: a set of 'dances of the world'. Despite the fact that this is quite specialised, we can see a tourist-like pattern here: a kind of souvenir collecting, but the collectible takes the form of an activity, something participatory, something alive, that involves experience and interaction. I also encountered three young women taking a taster percussion session who were beginners. In some cases such sessions may even be free, suggesting that the teachers are specifically catering for people who will take a series of classes. This is further confirmed by the deals they offer, giving a discount for 5 or 10 lessons booked. It is fairly common for teachers not to show up or to be late, sometimes by several hours. So, even someone taking a few introductory lessons has to be fairly determined to make this initial engagement. I would argue that this is already more time and effort than the ordinary tourist would normally be prepared to invest.

Teachers are usually keen to provide cultural background information, even to relatively inexperienced and casual students. In dance classes details about different dance genres, regional variations, gender specific style variations, attendant music genres, origins and cultural contexts are incorporated for all standards. In fact, the levels of attainment are quite often combined, and this is one of the particular hallmarks of Bahian teaching of cultural practices: beginners are frequently taught with advanced students, providing a high level of participatory accessibility and enabling fast and insightful learning in those keen to become more deeply involved.

⁶ I did meet a Brazilian taking a dance class with me who was herself a teacher and was hired by one of the large tourist hotels in the city to run dance classes there. I would differentiate between this and visitors finding classes on their own initiative however.

Type 2: divers

Another kind of visitor might be described as an enthusiast. This is someone who is involved in something like a samba band or capoeira group at home. Such groups tend to take up a good deal of members' time, they provide recreation, creative outlet, exercise, challenge, travel and not least social contacts (see Eisentraut 2013). They also facilitate an ad hoc identification of the kind associated with an absorbing leisure activity, what Urry (2000, p. 143) describes as 'bunds'⁷ or 'sociations' which 'may empower people, providing relatively safe places for identity-testing and [provide] the context for learning new skills'. Initially informants involved in this way had not joined because they were interested in Brazil or Brazilian culture. Their motives were more immediate, involving the social aspects mentioned. Eventually the concept of a cultural 'Zion' opened up to them, transmitted by fellow members in the form of accounts, stories and myths. Sometimes the groups they belong to have direct contact to the 'motherland' through a Brazilian cultural entrepreneur who has created a chain of clubs, often in several countries. This link can suggest and facilitate travel to Bahia. In some instances such 'tourists', are provided with accommodation and structured activities centred around the home base of their club in Salvador.

It is clear from conversations and interviews, but also from my own experience of the Batala network of percussion bands, that these kinds of travellers are frequently 'pod-hopping' when they make this kind of visit. In other words, they are moving between the nodes of a network. The school/house in Salvador may be some kind of home base for the group, but participants in such trips are likely to be reinforcing their integration in their particular global community. Often they travel with others from their own local club, and on arrival they meet not only Brazilian practitioners, but also members of other branches of the same or similar organisations from other countries and continents. Thus they are deepening their integration into a global group of enthusiasts connected by their involvement in a Bahian cultural form.

They also find themselves training with Brazilians and possibly performing in Bahian carnival. This may well involve being part of processions lasting up to seven hours during which they are not necessarily made to feel welcome by Brazilian band or group members.

⁷ From German *Bund* meaning 'league', the grammatically correct plural would be *Bünde*. Derived from the work of the German economist Eugen Schmalenbach. See Hetherington, K., 1994.

The leaders, as well, can be strict and brusque. Furthermore, Salvador is not very amenable to non-Portuguese speakers, particularly in the streets. So this is an experience which is not cushioned or cut down to tourist size, but challenging, and encompassing considerable culture shock. Talking with samba musicians and capoeira players in the UK made it clear that having been through such an experience gives these travellers a certain enhanced status in the group back home. The discourse inside such organisations often turns on questions and notions of authenticity and having had Brazilian experience provides a sense of more direct contact with authentic practice.

Type 3: swans

The idea of authenticity is more valuable still if one is a teacher or performer, and I found foreign leaders of bands, teachers of dance or percussion, capoeira *mestres*, professional or semi-professional performers on longer stays in Bahia. I have heard such teachers refer liberally to their experiences in Brazil when they lead groups back in Europe. Many of them come for several months and return regularly. These studying travellers usually achieve some level of competency in Portuguese. They take regular lessons in their specialism from one or more local teachers and will often participate in group practice or performance. They will tend to be travelling alone rather than in a group, following their own agenda, which will however usually include expert tuition and language learning. Although they are independent these visitors tend to build up their own web of relevant connections in Salvador and beyond. This is because, as experts, they will already have been involved with teachers, groups and courses in their locality and probably more widely in their country and continent. In Salvador they will then seek out and work with Brazilians active in their cultural form. Inevitably they also meet others on similar missions to their own. These may be from another part of the world, but will be sharing a strong interest in an activity like Bahian drumming or dancing and in some cases have the same teachers in Salvador. Thus, the specialist visitor is not necessarily tied into a specific network of clubs, but is making connections with key individuals who will be teachers, experts, advanced students, cultural entrepreneurs and so on.

Having encountered Brazilian music or dance genres at home, the adopters of this type become aware of a difference, a lack, an uncertainty, a sense of artificiality in the diasporic

practice. The (usually repeated) sojourns in Brazil provide context. They augment understanding of cultural meaning in a way that only working in the culture's 'home' can do. There is a feeling of going deeper, of finding roots, of gaining a more profound sense of what is to be expressed. Four specific types of enhancement can be identified. First, technical matters around execution of performance through guided practice and observation, particularly with virtuosos and experts. Second, familiarisation with genres and variations related to those already encountered, which are antecedents or less distributed but in some way fundamental, giving a fuller picture. Third, the kind of subtleties which are easily lost when something is learned by outsiders; inflection, expression, combination, flair etc. An example is the rhythmic 'feel' of much of Bahian music, often known as 'swing'⁸ or *suingue*. Others are the joyful energy and power of dance moves sometimes known as *axé*,⁹ or the combination of choreographies with drumming performance. Fourth, cultural meanings such as the relation of particular rhythms or dances to *Candomblé* deities or rituals. It is telling that I am beginning to use Bahian terms here, indicating phenomena not easily described without specialist local terminology and therefore more difficult to transmit abroad. The Canadian percussionist I interviewed told me that he felt like he was 'going backwards', going back to the roots and making connections; doing jazz at college, then becoming interested in choro,¹⁰ then samba, then *samba de roda*¹¹ and eventually *Candomblé*.¹² This describes a progression from genres closer to his home culture, and more accessible to him, to ones less familiar, older and more specific to Brazil and Bahia. He sees the latter as giving him a more privileged connection with the origins of the broader family of music styles with which he is involved. This can include jazz because of its historical African elements and the corresponding perceived 'Africaness' of Bahian culture.

'Swans' are very experienced in their performing activity generally. They are often trained, qualified and professional in areas such as dance and music. They are likely to have completed relevant courses and workshops, even degrees. Most will have taught, and led public performances. At some point they gravitated towards Brazilian culture and eventually made the decision to travel to the country. Salvador will probably feature on their itinerary because of its reputation as a font of Afro-Brazilian music and dance. However, they do

⁸ This is not the same kind of swing as the jazz, triplet feel which is described by the same term.

⁹ This term is also a genre term for Bahian popular music.

¹⁰ Historical popular Brazilian instrumental music genre.

¹¹ Folkloric genre.

¹² See below.

travel to other centres such as Rio de Janeiro, Recife and São Paulo, but settle on one place for in-depth study. What these travellers engage in can be described, because of their expertise and prior experience, as a kind of culturally specific, independent, professional specialisation and training. This is underscored by the fact that several of the ones I interviewed were assisted by grants for arts training from their countries of origin. One interesting aspect of the activities of some of these kinds of travellers is that when they teach outside Brazil, some of their students are actually Brazilian emigrants looking to reconnect with Brazilian culture¹³ - an intriguing example of the kind of non-essentialized, globally distributed cultural identification and participation which seems to be developing.

Type 4: mermaids

The Afro-Brazilian polytheistic faith of *Candomblé* is quite clearly of African origin, with its deities, rhythms, dances and terminology connecting directly with West African practices. This is a religion of slave survival and resistance; suppressed, persecuted, hidden and eventually instrumentalized by various national and state politicians. It was finally brought into the current cultural discourse as the ultimate expression of African identity in Bahia (van de Port 2011). The devotees are divided into tribes such as Ketu, Ijexa and Angola, which are mainly hereditary and derived from African places of origin, and many of the chants used are in Yoruba and other African languages. However even in Bahia, despite its omnipresent iconography, this cult is rather specialist, evangelical churches being much more numerous than *Candomblé* temples. It is an unlikely practice then, to appeal to, or to be accessible to, complete outsiders, particularly since Bahian devotees are almost all African-Brazilian, whereas the Westerners under consideration here are almost all white.

Foreign percussionists are sometimes drawn to it because rhythms they learn in other styles can often be traced to similar ones in *Candomblé*, where they interconnect with a rich weave of the spiritual and the mystical, expressed through dances, chants and incantations. A limited contact with aspects of this cult is possible for anyone interested, through mock rituals specially performed for tourists, or lessons in dance or music. There are a small number of Westerners, however, who have managed to penetrate the arcane world of *Candomblé* ritual

¹³ In an interesting double flip, the Brazilian teacher of an all-female samba band in Brasília, the capital, turned out to have first started learning to play in Manchester, UK.

and hierarchy. One of these is Jon Hardeman who described to me the long periods of training and study he has completed. To become an alabé (temple musician) he had to learn a range of rhythms, drumming techniques and their associated ritual functions and meanings. He also had to become initiated into Candomblé, learning about the religion and becoming accepted by a congregation as a member. As well as Yoruba chants, rituals involve related dances with which he had to become familiar. An existing alabé had to accept him as a novice and teach him over many months. At the appropriate time he underwent an initiation process taking about a week. From then on, as a committed alabé, he has served at ceremonies (which in Candomblé take many hours) and continues to learn and is engaged with what has become his home *terreiro* or temple.

The process of approaching and becoming part of Candomblé took over a dozen years from Jon's first visit to Salvador. In the weeks spent in Brazil contemplating going through the initiation rituals he had two medical emergencies. In the first case he nearly died, in the second he was told he needed to be flown home or he risked paralysis. He was shocked and depressed by this but checked himself out against medical advice. When he emerged from the clinic he decided: 'I'm going to do it – I'll be initiated as an alabé'. As part of this ritual, novices receive a Candomblé deity as their protector; in Jon's case this was Omolu.

'Omolu is an old guy, he is the earth, his face is the sun, which is always veiled. He is St. Lazarus in Santeria in Cuba. He is the Orixá of preventative remedies. After I had become an alabé I came out of the flat where I had been staying. There was an old guy sitting outside and we said hello and he said: "I'm Lazarus, the caretaker"'.¹⁴

As he was telling me of these experiences it became clear that they were central to his life story. The decision to delve into this cult was life-changing and even life-defining for him. This is true of his identity and his work back home in the UK, where he teaches music and runs or participates in various percussion groups, which incorporate Candomblé music and dance for recordings, performances and workshops.

What is attractive and accessible to outsiders in Bahian culture?

¹⁴ Lazarus is appropriate here because in the Biblical story (John 11: 1-46) Lazarus of Bethany is raised from the dead by Jesus and my interviewee had recently been in a coma and been given a pessimistic diagnosis in the second of the medical emergencies mentioned.

The phenomenon of contemporary Western interest in foreign and exotic cultural practices is clearly not uniquely associated with Brazil. Some genres, such as Latin dance have been taken up by so many as to have become almost mainstream. Others, including *shakuhachi* flute playing and Bulgarian singing are more specialised, but have still attracted significant numbers of enthusiasts. There may be some aspects of engaging with a foreign cultural form which are common to several or most incidences. In some ways these aspects are the most interesting since they may tell us something about the kind of subject position, the kind of personality, the type of malaise, the sort of desire, the general motivations that entice someone away from the local to something which is not given to them but which they have to search out, which takes them out of themselves and their cultural context, perhaps because it corresponds to an unsatisfied part of their psyche. I will return to such generally applicable questions later, but first there are a number possible points of attraction and accessibility of the Brazilian practices we are dealing with here which should be discussed.

The forms I am referring to; capoeira, samba percussion, Afro-Brazilian dance; have an easily accessible entry level. Beating out a basic rhythm on a drum, making some straightforward dance or capoeira steps is within most people's ability. There are not the many hours of practice required to persuade an instrument like the violin or saxophone to render an acceptable note, or the more complex or strenuous movements of some other martial arts or dance forms. However impressive the skill of the experts, these practices look like something one could 'have a go at', even if at a simple level. In addition to this, many teaching situations of Afro-Brazilian genres of this kind are multi-level, meaning beginners, intermediate and advanced students practice and learn together. This means that one does not have to go to a special beginners' class, but can join in with a general session which is more exciting. For music groups this can mean that one is playing simple patterns, but together with much better players, with the result that one is part of an impressive sound, giving immediate pleasure and raising confidence. At the same time, the beginner is obviously aware of the huge difference between her skills and those of the experts. This situation however can also encourage the keen and able student to improve quickly and try anything at any point, without having to progress through an official graded plan. This effects, in many cases, rapid learning and a sense of exhilaration and excitement, of daring and achievement and, inevitably in some cases, frustration. Nevertheless, even the latter is not without its attraction, since we often respond to challenge; a game which is too easy is no fun. Thus, on

the one hand the accessibility, and on the other the scope, difficulty and complexity, which are inherent in these performing art forms, particularly in terms of rhythmic subtlety and bodily co-ordination, stamina, discipline, strength etc., keep people's interest, draw them into a cycle of learning, striving and achieving which can turn into a passion as recounted by many of my informants, for some of whom this passion has become their main focus and even their profession.

For a number of reasons it is easy to find situations where newcomers and outsiders are encouraged to participate in Brazilian cultural practices. One is that these are not usually limited by number. A samba percussion ensemble is a good example. As long as instruments are available there is huge flexibility in terms of numbers of players. One could make an acceptable sound with 3, 30 or 300 players. Compare this to a rock band for instance where anything above 7 or 8 is likely to be unmanageable. Consequently it is extremely common in the samba scene in the West for outsiders to be asked to participate if they are observing a rehearsal. Inclusion goes beyond playing, however. In Brazil, audience members and passers-by at samba performances routinely dance and sing to the band. This goes back to historical forms of samba such as *samba de roda* where people stand in a circle singing and clapping, and take it in turns to come into the middle to perform. While this format is not unknown in other cultures, it is virtually ubiquitous in Afro-Brazilian traditions; capoeira and candomblé following the same pattern. The point here is that everyone gets the opportunity to have their turn in the circle's centre, and the *roda*, wheel or circle itself can be easily expanded to accommodate extra participants.

This welcoming circle then, becomes an expression of community. Everyone facing each other, making eye-contact, smiling, turned inwards, creating a communal space. It is this sense of community which is one of the reasons given by many of the interviewees for their enthusiasm. The engendered community also carries with it another value frequently invoked by informants in this connection: power. This would be most aptly circumscribed by terms such as 'empowerment' or 'social capital'. The identity of the ad hoc community becomes a refuge to its members, a way for them to present a united image to the 'outside'. It represents a network of support which is acted out in performance, but also has considerable value in their lives.

Another aspect of Afro-Brazilian cultural phenomena is what I have called holistic engagement (Eisentraut 2013, p. 231). This is the united deployment of forms of expression that have come to be conceived as more separate in much of European-derived culture: narrative, playing music, singing, dance, poetry, fashion, ritual. In most Bahian cultural forms these are virtually inseparable, addressing different senses and engaging different aspects of the individual, whether as performer or audience member. The various modalities are often jointly deployed in celebratory events for which they provide the requisite energy, the primary one being carnival. Informants report a considerable sense of exhilaration and wellbeing as a result of participating in such activities and bemoan, rightly or wrongly, the lack of similar opportunities in their native cultural spheres.

An extension of this holism, is that the expressive rhythmic physicality involved inevitably carries a sexual component. This is accentuated, or liberated, for cultural outsiders by the fact that the activity lies outside their normal cultural repertoire and therefore allows them to supersede inhibitions and norms otherwise limiting sexualised expression. Samba percussion and capoeira are 'sexy' but in ways which do not reinforce conventional Western gender relations, because they do not follow the same expressive patterns as are found in Western culture. Women participants and even women's groups are quite common, but for (Western) men, too, this is an unconventional way to perform and construct gender and sexuality. In Bahia itself the gender aspect of these forms clearly has established associations; it is the foreignness of the practices that makes them liberating for outsiders.

Although the performing arts considered here have roots going back centuries and are clearly influenced by the cultures of the African diaspora, they are also evolving and developing in contemporary Brazil. This is not just happening imperceptively, as with all social activities, but actively and consciously. In other words, the 'traditions' are in many cases valued not for their unchanging antiquity, but for their contemporary living embodiment of older identities, meanings and values. In this way a sense of depth, history and mystery is conveyed without it appearing anachronistic. In fact, samba, capoeira and even candomblé can be considered 'cool', and fashionable; in the West - due to the cachet of the social subgroup that has 'discovered' them; and in Bahia - because they hold a particularly respected position in that cultural sphere - and are continually updated and (re-)synthesized.

I have previously argued (Eisentraut 2013, pp. 253-274) that allowance must be made for an immanent appeal of Afro-Brazilian music and musical practice, which immediately interpellates some people even if they are completely unfamiliar with it. A full explanation of this phenomenon, sometimes experienced as a moment of revelation according to informants, includes a recognition of certain musical structures as inherently suitable for particular interpretations and uses, such as the celebratory applications already mentioned. Finally, credit has to be given for the uptake of Bahian culture to cultural entrepreneurs; capoeira mestres, musical directors, composers, percussionists and dance teachers, who make a living, and in some cases a successful business, out of promoting and disseminating their art form at home and abroad.

What needs and desires does Bahian culture satisfy?

To transpose oneself voluntarily into another cultural orbit is necessarily an attempt to metamorphose, it is a leaving behind of a known cultural location of belonging, for a place of dreams. The destination is an imagined place in the sense that it is unknown and the initial impetus for in-depth cultural travel is the flight from self - and the search for self. Ulrich Beck's theme of individualisation in late-modern society suggests that the flight towards an alien identity may not be so much away from other identity-giving social structures, but from lack of such structures. It is perhaps not the rejection of an identity and the search for another, but the desire for any discernible and acceptable identity at all; not the rejection of one community for another, but the joining of a community rather than existing in relative social abstraction. It is clear from the accounts of informants that the networks based around their adopted cultural practice are amongst the most important in their lives. This is evident both in terms of the activities, friends and acquaintances they talk about, and in 'community' being explicitly expressed as a value they have gained in the adoption process.

Individualisation requires us to design life as a project, or a series of projects. Making a strong connection with another culture is such an endeavour, and one which will change the individual significantly. In so doing the culture seeker becomes part of an implicit community. Not the community of Afro-Bahian-Brazilians who practice the chosen cultural form, but of a globally dispersed community of individuals who share the same interest. Such communities will of course give rise to nodes: the samba bands, the capoeira schools, and as

such contribute to the diffuse structures of the individualised lifeworld of late modernity. Beck suggests that ‘The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement ...[might provide] the basis for a new cosmopolitanism, by placing globality at the heart of political imagination, action and organisation’.¹⁵ Rather than engage in the abstract, impersonal and distanced paradigms of party politics, nation state or some supranational ideology, people can become part of a meaningful interest community, made up of those they, to some extent, know personally. The community will be based on a clear common pursuit as well as explicit and implicit tastes, values and aims. It is also a global community based on local ones. The home club is usually a collection of acquaintances and friends who meet regularly, have a good deal in common and share the experiences the club offers. Beyond that, in the imagination, lies the network to which the club belongs, coming into focus when members or leaders visit, or when there are joint events or workshops, or trips to visit other clubs; or even Brazil - the ‘mother country’.

The nausea of the known

A good deal of scholarly attention has focused on the subjectivity of those who are thrown into situations of cultural marginality by economic or political forces, such as the (ex-) colonised or economic migrants. Tourists, who voluntarily go in search of the taste of difference, have also been widely considered. But what of those who freely seek a more substantial engagement with an alien culture? I have dealt with what might be attractive in Bahian culture, but the question also arises; what leads people to try to escape their own. This is a potential jumping off point for a critique of Western culture, and Beck’s perspective has already been mentioned. Lévi-Strauss writes of the Western need for exotic stimulation thus:

‘People used to risk their lives in India and America for the sake of returns which now seem to us derisory: redwood (*bois de braise*, from which comes the name of Brazil); red dye, or pepper, for which there was such a craze at the court of Henri IV that people carried a grain or two with them everywhere, in *bonbonnières*; such things gave an extra stimulus to sight and smell and taste, and extended, as it were, the sensory keyboard of a civilization which had not recognized its own insipidity. Are we to draw a parallel with the Marco Polos of our own day who bring back from those same territories in the form, this time, of photographs the heightened sensations which grow ever more indispensable to our society as it founders deeper and deeper in its own boredom?’ (1961, p. 39-40)

¹⁵ Quoted in Clarke and Marcus (2011).

Clearly, participatory cross-cultural learning goes beyond such tokenistic consumption of the 'other', replacing it with immersive experience and varying measures of biculturalism. The experience of the ethnographer, the explorer, the immigrant and the tourist, are sliced, combined, reformed and made available (through globalisation) to anyone in the West with the right inclination and motivation. The sense I have from my fieldwork is that we are dealing with more than simply an attraction for the *other*. There is also an escape from the *same*; from a nausea of the known. Home is where there is nothing new, where everything tastes as standard. Language, music, climate; all are 'normal', whatever they are in fact like, one is absolutely habituated to them. That is why tourists travel, perhaps, although many don't actually want to stray so far from the safe and the known, however great the actual distance covered, and most of them do not go for long. But the culture seeker is after more than an impression, she wants the whole experience, or as close to it as she can attain.

Culture adopters as mimics?

The mimicry of the cultural travellers described differs substantially from that of groups under colonial or neo-colonial subjugation, or of those displaced for political or economic reasons; the key distinction being agency. The Westerners studied here choose freely to come to Bahia and expose themselves to a situation which they knew would be bound to challenge them with its cultural difference. Yet it is worth emphasising that in many respects their subsequent situation of liminality bears certain similarities to that of involuntary mimics. The first and most obvious is language. Non-Lusophone visitors to Bahia find that English speakers are very much the exception in the contexts they seek out. There may be some teachers who have worked outside Brazil who have foreign language skills, but the onus is usually on the visitors to learn and use Portuguese. This is the result of several phenomena. There are the enormous size of Brazil and its population, and the perception of Portuguese itself as a world language. Cultural confidence plays its role, partly due to the predominance and richness of Brazilian cultural products and media in the country. US influence exists of course, particularly in cinema, but it is tempered by a conscious resistance to it by both intellectuals and the less educated. We can also allow deficiencies of the education system as a reason for lacking language skills. The result is that even English monoglots, who frequently move around the planet assuming the ubiquity of their language, need to learn

Portuguese, and as I have mentioned, they usually do if their involvement exceeds a certain level.

Language is just one instance where the cultural traveller puts herself in the position of pupil, of the unskilled, of the one who has to be instructed and who is bound to be inept, at least while they study. And, as Bhabha (1994) points out in terms of the colonised, mimics always fall short, and just as with the colonial situation, their failure is absolutely inherent in the context. This context, after all, is predicated a particular narrative of African-Brazilian identity to which the student can never entirely belong. The perception of authenticity, from which flows considerable cultural authority, is shared by insiders and adopters alike. Giba Gonçalves, leader of the Batala network of percussion groups, compared the short experience of some foreign samba teachers with his own '500 years' of experience, referring to the period of African-Bahian history. It is only in the 'third space' of the community of learners, particularly in the capoeira club or dance class back home, that the committed student benefits absolutely from higher status due to increased knowledge and direct experience. However, my research does not suggest that this is a primary motivation. Rather, it is a thirst for otherness, a passion for the cultural form which has engaged them and the desire to get as close as possible to some kind of true origin of that form.

For that the travellers accept that initially their status in the 'other' place will in some senses be lowly indeed, but they retain the sense of themselves as adventurers, as extraordinary for exposing themselves to such an alien environment (Jon Hardeman emphasised the point by rhetorically asking of hypothetical tourists who were less involved: 'Do you have any idea what I do here?'). The culture adopters insert themselves into a hierarchy in which they can never be top, or even entirely at ease, very much like Bhabha's colonials or Naipaul's mimic men. It is a move which empowers the chosen 'other' and implicitly indicates shortcomings in the travellers' native culture. It allows them to benefit from contact with the 'authentic' and 'exotic', from which they appear to receive a reflected aura while at the same time uprooting them, making them homeless, since their cultural origins hold such relatively feeble attractions for them. Thus they come to occupy a special but marginal position in their home context, half turned towards another culture, in which they are expert to an extent, but to which they profess an equivocal relationship, because they did not grow up within it; because even some of the most advanced adopters still struggle with the Portuguese language; and because they continue to be regarded as outsiders (gringos) by most Brazilians

I have talked to about this. While the learners talk freely about their experience, knowledge and familiarity with the specific practice they follow, some (not all) Brazilians are doubtful, or even dismissive of their level of familiarity compared to locals who have been immersed in Afro-Bahian culture their whole lives.

Bhabha and Said, have looked to the migrant experience as an alternative to monolithic conceptions of identity, particularly national identity, offering more differentiated ideas of hybridity and cultural interflow. This can certainly be applied to the present study, where individuals exemplify a kind of cultural mobility and flexibility which is a manifestation of widespread globalising processes. Boundaries are blurred when Western experts instruct Brazilian novices in capoeira or samba-reggae. Furthermore, in the more usual situation of the Bahian Master (*Mestre*) and the Western student, there is an inversion of obsolete, but nevertheless still potent, hierarchies such as North – South, developed – developing, white – black, USA – Latin America and so on. Such traditional directions of influence have been installed by various kinds of power, mainly economic and military power, and these usually generate the wave which carries cultural power. However, this coming together of forces acting in the same direction is not a feature of the phenomenon being examined here. The influence is not brought about in conjunction with the projection of military power, or capitalist expansion by mega-corporations, but by apparently random cultural attraction and interpersonal dissemination.

Using Bhabha's words we could say that this mimicry, this '... "partial" representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence' (Bhabha 1984, p. 127). And notions of identity are indeed attenuated here. The 'essential' blackness and Brazilianess of African-Brazilian practice are challenged by Northern imitators, but paradoxically, the sense of cultural identity in Bahia is emphasised, since it is seen internally and externally as a point of attraction. Meanwhile, the culture adopters implicitly critique and subtly inflect their own culture which is dispersed, progressively losing itself through its voracity.

Conclusion

This study has described the varying degrees to which various visitors to Salvador become involved in particular Bahian cultural practices and in Brazilian culture generally. Their

immersion ranges from lessons of a few hours, to repeated stays of several months, with intense study and participation. In this process some become expert in a ‘foreign’ form which is intricately connected to its local context and requires the acquisition of a plethora of linguistic, choreographic, musical and other skills. The participatory cross-cultural learners and adopters have commonalities with, but also differ considerably from groups which have been extensively theorised previously, such as tourists, economic migrants, refugees and colonised peoples. Thus concepts, which have been developed with reference to these groups, like the idea of ‘mimicry’ applied in this paper, may provide interesting discussion points but are unlikely to be entirely applicable and need to be developed and adapted in order to further illuminate the processes in question. A theorisation in terms of performativity would be a possible alternative or additional approach requiring further research and discussion beyond the scope of the present paper. Certainly there are implications for thinking about subjective and social identities in a globally interacting poly-cultural situation. Taking oneself voluntarily into an alien sphere suggests considerable freedom. This level of agency is partly a product of the broad horizon furnished by education and life in a wealthy society and yet it is also the social fragmentation and abstraction of that society, as described by Beck, which sends culture adopters in search of self-identity and community in practices, places and contexts far removed from their own origins.

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